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NewsNight

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Soviet Coup and U.S. Intelligence

ANCHORMAN: Some intelligence experts are predicting the fall of Mikhail Gorbachev will give rise to a new surge in Cold War in spying networks, but others say the coup was not unexpected and was even predicted by the man President Bush wants to run the CIA.

CNN's David French has more.

'DAVID FRENCH: Most Americans learn about spies in the bookstore. Real ones are elusive by nature. They flit into the news and are gone, like Felix Bloch, whose 30-year State Department career ended when he was accused of selling secrets to the Soviets. The FBI couldn't prove it and he was never charged. Or Jonathan Pollard, serving a life sentence for spying on the U.S. for Israel. It is a murky world where even friends spy on one another.

Did America's intelligence agencies botch the job on the Soviet coup? Retired Deputy CIA Director George Carver thinks now, saying key former colleagues have been warning all along

that the reign of Gorbachev could be like a moth nearing the flame.

GEORGE CARVER: Far from the least of those is Robert Gates, whose track record as a Sovietologist, even though in the course of making his predictions he's managed to infuriate two successive Secretaries of State, but I think that his overall track record speaks for itself and speaks very creditably for him.

FRENCH: Soviet defector and former KGB agent Arkady Shevchenko is less charitable about Western intelligence.

ARKADY SHEVCHENKO: In fact, I think they were caught by surprise. And that's not good.

CARVER: It's going to once again highlight the need to augment technological collection with human intelligence.

FRENCH: A consensus is forming that there were sufficient and significant warnings: the U.S. Secretary of Defense, National Security Deputy Gates, and signals from the Soviets, Shevardnadze and Yakovlev.

SHEVCHENKO: I'm absolutely confident there were some voices of reason from the intelligence community. But you know, unfortunately I know by my own experience that there is [unintelligible].

FRENCH: The thesis emerges, in a society of multiple voices, even the spies disagree, allowing politicians and statesmen to ignore them.